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Note by the Secretary-General

At the request of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly a report approved by the Board of Trustees of the Institute, entitled "Reflections of the Board of Trustees on development and possible reformatting of UNITAR", which is contained in the annex.

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Annex

Reflections of the Board of Trustees on development and possible reformatting of UNITAR

1. More than half of the members of the Board of Trustees will be completing their second tenure by the end of 1999, and will thus be no longer eligible for re-election.

2. Most of these Trustees have been closely connected and identified with the fundamental restructuring process which UNITAR has undergone over these past years. Their departure will change the format and profile of the Board of Trustees significantly. It will, in some ways, mark the end of a phase at UNITAR and the possible beginning of the next.

3. The reconstitution of the Board of Trustees will also coincide with the end of the current century and millennium. While the process of reform and improvement has to be a constant and ongoing exercise, the passage from one century to the next encourages self-examination and reflection on the future directions that UNITAR should take.

4. The paragraphs set out below are aimed at encouraging a reflection on what could be a vision of UNITAR in perhaps 5 or 10 years from now. A joint answer to that question could also help give the right guidance to the Secretary-General and to the Executive Director.

5. The fact that UNITAR has turned itself around, from an institution which had lost much of its credibility and utility just a few years ago to one which is as highly focused and as successful as it is now, is indeed a source of satisfaction for all concerned. The credit for this goes primarily to the Executive Director and to his exemplary personal rigour and sense of direction. As part of the support and guidance team, the Trustees too can justifiably share in the happy results produced by an institution which is now recognized by all as useful, healthy and solvent. The ultimate test for a United Nations institution comes in the verdict of the Member States, and that is why the General Assembly resolutions on UNITAR speak for themselves.

6. It is hardly necessary to go into details about the current activities of UNITAR since these are largely known. However, some broad indicators need to be noted for purposes of this exercise.

7. In the field of training, about 120 courses are now being organized regularly each year, benefiting about 4,000 persons from almost all the member and observer States. Of the total training courses being conducted, about 16 per cent are run at Geneva, 14 per cent in New York, and all remaining 70 per cent *in situ* in the Member States themselves. The breakdown of the total number of these courses shows that about two thirds are related to capacity-building (with a very strong and major emphasis on environmental issues, and a relatively minor emphasis on financial management, information technologies and urban planning etc.) and the other one third to multilateral diplomacy (including international law, peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy, and international trade).

8. In the field of research, the Trustees made a conscious decision a few years ago to freeze most effort in this field, and to concentrate on training. This policy was also endorsed by the General Assembly. Some good reference material has been prepared and published under UNITAR auspices, including books on diplomacy, dispute settlement and conflict prevention, the International Criminal Court, and the Economic Cooperation Organization. In addition, of course, UNITAR has also published several books on its training programmes and training modules, and edited several compilations on its seminars, all of which are recommended source documents.

9. In the field of personnel management, UNITAR remains a noticeably small and tightly run institution. It has a total of 42 staff, of whom only one is at the Principal Officer level, 34 being Professionals or assimilated (fellows) and 8 General Service. The unusually low ratio of General Service staff to Professionals is due to the relative youth and dynamism of the Professional as well as the General Service staff, their high level of computer skills and the willingness on both sides to contribute to a broader range of duties. This proven team-approach maximizes Professional management skills and motivates General Service staff. Almost all of the staff is headquartered at Geneva, with only four being located in the New York office.

10. UNITAR's total annual budget of roughly $6.5 million is divided into about $1 million as the general fund, and about $5.5 million as special purpose grants. All of these revenues come directly to UNITAR, and no part is drawn from the regular budget of the United Nations.

11. Thus concludes a short summary of the UNITAR of today. The question then is should UNITAR now relax and rest on its laurels and carry on with business as usual, or should it begin to plan to move forward to the next phase, whatever that phase might be?

Arguments in favour of change

12. *Declining ODA*. For the foreseeable future, official development assistance (ODA) will remain in decline. Its magnitude will be nowhere comparable to the needs of pervasive poverty in the developing world. Institutions like UNITAR may therefore have to concentrate their efforts, not in trying to secure increased government funding for their programmes but in maximizing capacity-building within the developing countries themselves within existing and available resources, some of which may have to be secured from alternative sources of funding. Donor fatigue and some reticence from the recipients, in the fact of "conditional" requests, usually unilaterally imposed, are among the causes of the decline. The phenomenon of globalization has undoubtedly accelerated the trend. Moreover, it is probable that the multilateral ODA share allocated to the United Nations system is decreasing even more rapidly than the general trend. The need to define a new approach is felt by all partners. It is usually accepted that the new approach could be articulated around the concept of multilateral aid, as a gap filler as it were, notably developing and strengthening of human capacities. Training aimed at improving individual skills and at strengthening the capacity and efficiency of institutions should represent the cornerstone of this new structure. A broad field is thus open to UNITAR activities.

13. *Narrow financial base*. Despite the above, the sad fact remains that only a handful of member States are actually contributing to UNITAR, while a far larger number are benefiting from it. Ironically, among the largest beneficiaries are some of the richest member States in the world, many of which are not contributing financially to UNITAR at all. Obviously, efforts have to be intensified to widen the financial base of UNITAR, for which several parallel avenues need to be pursued.

14. *Mushrooming of training institutes*. There seems to be no shortage of training institutes in the United Nations system. While their respective charters and statutes are laudable in intent and definition, the result is much duplication and overlap. Perhaps the simplest division of responsibilities would have been that UNITAR should train and do research for the direct benefit of member States, while other institutions should concentrate on the training of staff members and on research in general, but that is not quite how it is working out. Territory seems frequently more important than a rational use of scarce resources.

15. As far back as 20 years ago, in its report on UNITAR (JIU/REP/79/18), the Joint Inspection Unit stated that *a network strategy* under which UNITAR would serve as a focal and coordinating point for the United Nations and United Nations-assisted regional or global institutes working in the fields of peace and development should be introduced gradually. This recommendation is ever more relevant with the passing of time, given the increased number of initiatives in the field of training and the decrease of means. Currently, all training and capacity-building programmes conducted by UNITAR, in any domain, are cooperative ventures with other institutions within or outside the United Nations. This is clearly shown from the list of ongoing programmes. The much repeated recommendation of Member States to strengthen inter-agency cooperation can be considered as fully implemented. This cooperation has proved to be a major factor and catalyst behind the success of the restructuring process.

16. *Low average age*. The average age of programme managers at UNITAR is well below that of the rest of the United Nations, where the staff's average age now stands at 50. This is an indicator that UNITAR is moving with the times and with a world in which the best and most innovative work is being done by the younger half of the population. While a low average age has implied better than average results at UNITAR, it requires some adjustment to the normal procedures and standards current in the United Nations regarding promotions and level of responsibility. In the final analysis, it is results that count, and not bureaucratic rules and norms.

17. *Management technique*. The procedure that has been developed in UNITAR is to give a lot of flexibility to programme managers, to find their own funding, and to work out the details of their programmes themselves. This decentralization has resulted in the successful expansion of many of the training programmes, and has earned much credibility for UNITAR, particularly in developing countries.

18. *New technologies*. The world is currently undergoing one of its greatest revolutions, as we come to the end of the industrial age and see the beginnings of the information age. Informatics and the Internet are completely and radically changing the way people think and act and manage their affairs. Any institution that does not see and adjust to these changes will be condemned to bureaucratic mediocrity in tomorrow's world. Nor would it help to hide behind the argument that the new technologies of the information revolution have not yet caught up with daily life in developing countries. They have in many cases, and inevitably will in all others. The secret therefore lies in staying ahead of the curve and not lagging behind it.

19. *Private sector growth.* The phenomenal growth in the power and scope of the private sector is another of the fundamental changes that has operated around the world, even in countries which traditionally eschewed this form of economic behaviour. With more than a trillion dollars a day being moved across borders at the speed of light (without passports or visas), the private sector is now a major actor on the world stage, and in most cases far more powerful than Governments themselves. This new private sector is here to stay, and as in the case of new information technologies the need for adjustment to this reality is inevitable.

20. *Evaluation of training impact.* UNITAR is progressively introducing procedures for the systematic and credible evaluation of its activities. Training does aim at increasing individual knowledge, but aims mostly at improving the skills of individuals to induce improvements in the institutional setting. Any serious evaluation exercise is an assessment of the impact of the programme, at the immediate, mid and long-term levels. This can be achieved by the training institutions or by external specialists. It implies a visit to the place two, three or five years after the programme. The evaluators should meet with the alumni, their direct hierarchical superiors and the chief of the services. The impact of the training programme on the institutions could thus be jointly assessed. UNITAR should pursue in this direction further.

Possible avenues for the future

21. The major determining factors which would appear to favour change have been listed. They would all have to be taken into consideration, and the Board of Trustees has spent time considering the situation in depth. Member States may wish to focus on the different aspects and questions during the debate in the Second Committee, in an effort to arrive at decisions regarding the future directions of a dynamic UNITAR. The Chairman of the Board submitted a set of concrete questions. The Trustees examined these, and after debate reached a set of collective recommendations, as set out below.

22. *Institutional size.* What is the optimum size of the UNITAR of the future? Should it remain a small and tight outfit, or has the time come to expand its activities? If so, should the increase be marginal, significant or dramatic? At what rate of growth should this increase be planned?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: UNITAR's size could depend on many factors, namely, the training needs of Member States, the geographical spread of the Institute's programmes and the resources available to it. Despite these variables, however, the Trustees felt that the *nature* of UNITAR's functions, i.e. its catalysing and facilitating role, should remain unchanged. Throughout its activities, the Institute should continue to promote and initiate change and to mobilize attention on new and emerging themes. The Trustees also felt that *consolidation* remained a priority with the objective to ensure that programmes had a built-in continuity that would not be shaken by unforeseen developments inherent to an institute of relatively modest means.

23. *Training focus.* Should the focus of UNITAR's training programmes remain more or less along the present lines, or should new areas of training be identified or new priorities implemented, in due consultation with the Member States who are the end users of these programmes? If so, what procedures should be defined for the purpose of consulting Member States in identifying desired fields of training? At what speed should the revised training programmes and priorities be implemented?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: Capacity-building remained the foundation for the development of Member States. UNITAR programmes should therefore continuously seek to sensitize countries, and to assist them with issues impacting their development in the medium and long terms. The task of defining these strategic directions belonged to the Board. It remained UNITAR's highest authority and had full competence to reflect on the priority areas for the Institute, and to set an agenda that could best reflect the interests of Member States. UNITAR's current programmes, eclectic and diversified as they were, aptly reflected the many and different needs expressed by programme beneficiaries, and were designed in response to specific and pressing requests. In terms of programme design, it was important to continue efforts to fully integrate the complexities of economic, developmental, social and environmental concerns of countries into cohesive capacity-building and training curricula, and also to better evaluate the long-term impact of training activities on institutional transformation. The Trustees felt strongly that the overall question of *evaluation and follow-up* should receive more attention throughout the consolidation phase and remain a key focus for the new Board of Trustees. In conclusion, the Trustees recalled that UNITAR's primary objective was to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations through training of personnel from member States, and they agreed that this remained the guiding principle for all future developments.

24. *Geographical spread.* The changes foreseen in the relative spread of training programmes between Geneva, New York and the cities of Member States? What would be the particular relevance of New York, which has taken off

at a dramatic rate, and where the training needs are obvious and acute from all accounts? Is UNITAR conducting enough training in other United Nations centres?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: Currently, UNITAR programmes were roughly divided among Geneva (16 per cent), New York (14 per cent) and the member States themselves (70 per cent). This emphasis on United Nations Headquarters and its centres would remain, and programmes therein were bound to grow. Nevertheless, the Board had to decide whether, without changing the global geographical balance, those locations hosting regional (Addis Ababa, Beirut, Bangkok and Santiago) could, funds permitting, also become additional sites for UNITAR training events. As to the current emphasis on conducting programmes in economic and social development, which represent the major part of UNITAR activities, these would obviously continue within the national contexts.

25. *Youthfulness of personnel*. Given the relative youth of the Professional staff at UNITAR, how can due encouragement be given in the way of faster promotions, so that the final evaluation of each Professional as an individual and of the institution as a whole can be done on a results-oriented basis? How would UNITAR position itself to answer the inevitable criticism which might come from other less fortunate parts of the United Nations system, where promotions are slower (and results less visible)?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: The young age of UNITAR staff had proven itself to be an advantage throughout the restructuring phase, and would certainly be an asset in light of the new challenges presented by the information revolution. A proper balance needed to be maintained, however, in providing enough incentive for this young and active corps while at the same time ensuring continued mobility and renewal within its ranks.

26. *Information technology*. How can better use (as opposed to patchy use) be made of the new information technology in furthering the wider and more economic diffusion of UNITAR training modules? Can UNITAR examine, within a well-defined and short time-frame, what methodologies should be used, not merely to put training materials on the UNITAR Web site, but more importantly, to use video-conferencing and audio-streaming as essential parts of its training procedures? What is the time-frame in which this can be done? Does UNITAR have personnel with the right profile to undertake the transmission of its training programmes via the Internet? If not, how soon can such personnel be brought on board?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: A stronger policy for the use of new information and communication technologies, including consistent recourse to audio-video facilities for outreach and listservers for consultations and evaluations, should remain a top priority for the Institute, its Board, management and staff. The Board felt that unless UNITAR was able to commit to such a strategy of maximizing the use of the Internet, its activities and output could remain marginal. It therefore expressed the hope that the new Board would look afresh at the whole range of challenges and opportunities that information technologies presented for an institute of the nature of UNITAR.

27. *Funding*. How should the funding of UNITAR's programmes be increased? If Governments are so slow and unabashed in their responses to the fund-raising efforts undertaken by the Trustees, should the focus not shift more towards the private sector and foundations in the search, not just for funds but also for partnerships? Given the important weight of United States-based foundations, how will UNITAR adjust to the inevitable need for an initial United States-based orientation to such an effort?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: Trustees would continue to play a vital role in UNITAR's fund-raising process, most notably within their own Governments. This first line of action needed to continue and expand in order to ensure that the Institute met its minimum funding requirements. The Trustees also felt that funding possibilities within foundations and the private sector needed to be tapped more aggressively, and they emphasized their commitment to exploring these new avenues. Insofar as any such funding did not compromise UNITAR's core value of being first and foremost responsive to the needs of member States, in particular those of developing countries, the Board felt that an active policy of fund-raising could be pursued on all possible fronts.

28. *Expanded focus on universities*. Given the enormous potential that exists among university students and the great interest that universities have in multilateral diplomacy, can the activities of UNITAR be expanded to reach out into universities with lecture programmes on the United Nations, its work, its wide gamut of activities, its quiet successes etc.? Can individuals be easily identified for such a vital effort? Can this be done within existing resources?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: The main and priority beneficiaries of UNITAR's training programmes were personnel of national services in member States. In the past, UNITAR programmes had benefited from the input of scholars from universities and

research centres. The Board felt that the Institute could, in turn, reach out and contribute to the reflections and ongoing work of these entities. The Board therefore encouraged a more assertive policy in this regard, insofar as it was done within existing resources and remained more of an informative nature. Once again, the Board felt that the evolution of information technologies provided an opportunity to reach out to this particular constituency without detracting from the focus of programmes for Member States.

29. *Research*. Given the fact that research is an essential part of the original mandate of the institution, what relative percentage of UNITAR resources should be devoted to this aspect of its work? What are the areas of research on which UNITAR should begin concentrating initially? How should the results of research be ventilated for maximum benefit to the work and profile image and presence of UNITAR?

The Board of Trustees took the following positions on the matter: The *main* and *priority* focus of UNITAR remains training, as per *article II, paragraph 2*, of its statute. However, paragraph 3 of the same article states: "The Institute shall conduct research and study related to the functions and objectives of the United Nations. Such research and study shall give appropriate priority to the requirements of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and of other United Nations organs and the specialized agencies." In the early 1990s, Member States were specific, however, in requesting that the Institute not use its general fund for the conduct of research in general, a principle to which the Trustees remain committed. With the completion of the restructuring phase, the Trustees felt that UNITAR could gradually expand upon those of its existing programmes that had a strong research component, insofar as this did not detract from training efforts *per se*. In short, the Trustees felt that the time was ripe to reconsider areas where operationally oriented research could further contribute to both the training activities of the Institute itself, and the larger reflection undertaken by the Secretary-General and the United Nations on future developments of the multilateral system.

30. Half of the current Trustees were appointed at the commencement of UNITAR's restructuring process. It was intended that they serve the Institute and help the Secretary-General in his endeavour. The baton has now to be passed on and the time seems ripe to sum up a possible legacy of these Trustees. This is particularly apt due to the fact that the coming years may well be among the most dynamic periods in the development and reformatting of the United Nations system.

31. The Board of Trustees were in overall agreement with the diagnostic of the Institute's activities, its evaluation of achievements to date and its assessment of the global context within which UNITAR would have to operate in the years to come. The Board decided that these considerations were of such importance that they deserved to be a matter of ongoing debate and deliberation. They should therefore continue within the context of the next Board of Trustees. In the meantime, the Board decided to submit its considerations to the General Assembly in the form of the present report.